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**A REVIVALIST 'ALIM'S RESPONSE TO DEVELOPMENT
(A. Latief Muchtar of the Persatuan Islam in Indonesia's
New Order)**

By: Mohammad Taufiq Rahman¹

Abstract

This article focuses on a religious scholar, an alim, in a totalitarian country: Indonesia's military regime under Soeharto. This regime of the New Order (1966-1998) witnessed a response of a revivalist alim, coming from an Islamic reformist tradition. Latief (1931-1997) of the Persis (Persatuan Islam -Islamic Union) to its program of modernization. The approach to discover Latief's life and work is the study of ulama (ulamalogy), in which biographical and sociological are among the methods. The main Latief's response being discussed here is Indonesian political context bringing about the issues of national development, Pancasila, religious plurality, and cultural Islamization. It should be noted, however, that all data related are mainly in Indonesia's context of 1990's.

Keywords: ulama, New Order, Islamic modernism, Persatuan Islam, reformation

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A. Introduction

Latief was a revivalist alim in the country, for he reacted to modernity in his lifetime. The title of this article comes from Yasin Mohamed's "Islamization: a revivalist response to modernity."¹ By this title I would like to explain how Latief reacted to the time and place which had already been changed by the texts (the Qur'an and Hadith) which have not changed. Although Latief's philosophy was not original, his activities were original. I would like to discuss him in the context of his responses to the development of his own region, Indonesia. The word "response" is appropriate for him. By the study of the ulama, which is also called ulamalogy,² I wish to give a short

¹ *Muslim Education Quarterly*, Winter Issue, Vol. 10, Number 2, 1993, pp. 12-23.

² Owing to the complicated nature of *ulama*, Humphreys seems to agree with Roy

account of how an alim emerged and developed in Indonesia and to compare my analysis to the theories of ulama before I mention the alim's response to the modernization of his country.

A. Latief Muchtar: A Modernist 'Ölim

Like other ulama Latief was called an alim.³ Like other Indonesian ulama he was also called a kyai.⁴ And like other Persis⁵ ulama

he was called ustad (Ar. Teacher). But due to his humbleness, he preferred to be called Bapak, an Indonesian title for "Mr." By this he wanted to be identified with the ordinary class of people in Indonesia.⁶

Similar to other ulama Latief also had Islamic educational experiences.⁷ During his life, Latief had chosen the modern Islamic educational system rather than the traditional

Mottahedeh in saying that the study of *ulama* is *ulamalogy*. R. Stephen Humpreys, *Islamic History: A Framework for Inquiry*, revised edition, London-New York: L.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 1995, p. 189 referring to Roy P. Mottahedeh in *Journal of American Oriental Society*, xcv, 1975, 495.

³ *Ulama* is an Arabic term which, strictly speaking, is the plural of 'alim, one who possesses the qualities of knowledge, learning and science in the widest sense. *Ulama* embodies qualities expected of one who believes in God and practices Islam. An alim should be Muslim. Someone who only has religious (Islamic) knowledge like an orientalist is not called an alim. H.A.R. Gibb and J.H. Kramers, *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1953, p. 599; John L. Esposito (ed.), *Oxford Encyclopaedia of the Modern Islamic World*, 4 vols. New York, 1995, art. "Sunni ulama" (Vol. IV, p. 258 by Iftikhar Zaman); *Ensiklopedi Islam*, Jakarta: Ichtiar Baru Van Hoeve, 1993, p. 120-1.

⁴ Although the word of *ulama* has become Indonesian, people from various regions called *ulama* in different ways. The Acehnese called them *teungku*; the West Sumatranese called them *tuanku* or *buya*; the Sundanese called them *ajengan*; the Javanese called them *kyai*; and the Banjarese, the Celebese, and the Nusa Tenggaraese called them *tuan guru*. Nowadays the title of *kyai* is going to be popularly nationalized, and not only for the Javanese. *Ensiklopedi Islam*, loc. cit.; Mahayudin Hj. Yahaya, *Ensiklopedia Sejarah Islam*, Bangi: Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1989, p. 1708; Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java*, Illionis: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1960, p. 134; Hiroko Horikoshi, *Kyai dan Perubahan Sosial*, Jakarta: P3M, 1987.

⁵ Persis, a short term of Persatuan Islam (Islamic Union), is a reformist-modernist

Islamic organization in contrast to Nahdlatul Ulama (NU, the renaissance of *ulama*), which is a traditional Islamic organization in the country. Characteristically, Persis is distinguished by its literal interpretation of the Qur'an and Hadith and its uncompromising attitude to later accruals. Historically, Persis was founded in 1923 by some traders who were very concerned about Islam. Ahmad Hassan, an Indian trader coming from Singapore was the central figure and the dominant inspirator of Persis. Mohammad Natsir, Hassan's pupil, was well-known for his active involvement in Indonesia's political activities in the Soekarno era, and his activities in *da'wa* in the Soeharto era. G. F. Pijper, *Studien Over de Geschiedenis van de Islam in Indonesië 1900-1950*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1977, p. 121; Howard Federspiel, *Persatuan Islam: Islamic Reform in Twentieth Century Indonesia*, Ph.D. Dissertation, McGill University, Canada, 1990, pp. 7-8; Martin van Bruinessen, "State-Islam relations in contemporary Indonesia: 1915-1990", in C. van Dijk and A.H. de Groot (eds.), *State and Islam*, Leiden, 1995, p. 99.

⁶ This tradition of title in Persis circles is familiar. Persis members usually call their preachers or their teachers "Ustad" (from Arabic *ustadh* meaning teacher). People liked to call A. Hassan "Tuan" ("Mr." in old Indonesian) and he liked it too. And people liked to call M. Natsir "Pak" ("Mr." in new Indonesian) and in his last period people liked to call him "Abah" (Father). Tamar Djaja, *Riwayat Hidup A. Hassan*, Jakarta: Mutiara, 1980, p. 98.

⁷ Gilsenan says that *ulama* are always being produced by the system of religious schools and universities. Michael Gilsenan, *Recognizing Islam: An Anthropologist Introduction*, London & Sydney: Croom Helm, 1982, p. 32.

one. In his early life he was educated within the Persis educational system. Then he went to Egypt for his Islamic higher education where he preferred the Darul Ulum University, a modern Islamic university, to al-Azhar, the more traditional one. Having graduated with a B.A. degree, he went back to Indonesia and continued his Islamic education in the State Institute of Islamic Studies (IAIN) in Jakarta. In this institute, however, Latief only obtained an M.A. degree for Islamic Studies, for he could not finish his thesis for a doctorate because of his busy activities as the chairman of Persis.⁸ Despite this, his achievement in Islamic scholarship was highly recognized by the Islamic community ('umma) of his time in Indonesia. In this way, his religious education, experience, and innate qualities paved the way for him to become an Islamic scholar, an alim.

Apart from being religious scholars, ulama are also the holy men of Islam. So, another aspect described to ulama is religious charisma, which is a consequence of their religious practices.⁹ From the information I gathered, Latief was a pious person from a young age. Since this charisma grows also from an ethic called *muru'a* (dignity), people perceived that Latief also followed this ethic. His *muru'a*, then, really made him a famous alim in Indonesia in his time, especially in the modernist circles.¹⁰

Regardless of their social class, ulama are religious elites.¹¹ In the case of

Latief, his position in the religious elite is quite obvious. This is because he was the General Chairman of Persis (1981-1997), a member of the Dewan Pertimbangan (Advisory Council) of the Majelis Ulama Indonesia (Indonesian Council of ulama), and he sometimes represented Indonesia in international Islamic conferences.¹²

As a member of the religious elite Latief had the authority to interpret Islam.¹³ During his life Latief wrote about many things regarding Islam. Furthermore, his concern for Islam was reflected in his preaching, fatwas (religio-legal advices) and sometimes in manifestoes. Because of his ideas and activities, his counterparts perceived him as one of the true guardians of the Islamic faith.¹⁴

Due to their status and their authority in religious affairs ulama establish themselves as cultural elite who can reproduce Islamic culture and can offer Islamic solutions to the situation at the same time.¹⁵ Latief proved himself to be one of them. He always reacted to the exact situation he faced. The source of his reaction is clear: it is nothing other than Islamic culture, as it has always been, and so he based his ideas and activities on the Qur'an and the Sunna, the primary texts of Islam.

From a social point of view, along with other ulama, Latief played a prominent

⁸ Dadan Wildan Annas, "Hayat, Perjuangan dan Visi (almarhum) K.H. Abdul Latief Muchtar, M.A.", *RISALAH* No. 9 Th. XXXV November 1997, p. 14.

⁹ Gilsenan, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

¹⁰ M. Amien Rais, the former General Chairman of Muhammadiyah, who admitted to being very close to Latief says that Latief was a sincere *alim* and had struggled for Islamic glory in the country. M. Amien Rais, "Gelombang dan Frekwensinya Sama dengan Muhammadiyah", *RISALAH* No. 9 Th. XXXV November 1997, p. 26.

¹¹ Bryan S. Turner, *Religion and Social Theory*, London: Sage Publications, 1991, p. 87; Nazih N. Ayubi, *Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Arab World*, London-New York: Routledge, 1995, *passim*.

¹² Dadan Wildan Annas, *Yang Dai Yang Politikus: Hayat dan Perjuangan Lima Tokoh Persis*, Bandung: Rosda, 1997, pp. 144-50.

¹³ *ulama* are religious elites who have religious authority. They are perceived as the true guardians and interpreters of the Islamic faith, for they have the authority to interpret the texts and they are the keepers of the texts: the Qur'an and the Hadith (the Tradition of the Prophet). Ayubi, *loc. cit.*; Gilsenan, *op. cit.*, pp. 30-1.

¹⁴ Anwar Harjono, "K.H. Abdul Latief Muchtar: Ulama yang Tawadhu' dan Pemimpin yang Gigih" in A. Latief Muchtar, *Gerakan Kembali ke Islam*, Bandung: Rosda, 1998, p. xx.

¹⁵ *Encyclopedia of the Modern Middle East*, edited by Reeva S. Simon, Philip Mattar, and Richard W. Bulliet, 1996, (Vol. IV, p. 1822, "ulama", Denise A. Spellberg).

role in his own society.¹⁶ He was a leader of Islamic rituals, a preacher, a lecturer, an administrator, and a writer. In the persis community he was famous for his idea to establish a Persis university, but in reality he just saw it as an Islamic academic institute which was not of the same standard as a university. He also formed two BPRS (Bank Perkreditan Rakyat Syari'ah [popular credit bank based on Syari'ah -Islamic law]). Before his death he was busy preparing to set up Darul Aitam (Islamic orphanage). In his function as a preacher, Indonesian ulama and other people were surprised by his low profile style in Islamic propagation (da'wa). He did not act as other Persis ulama, who were often called extremist ulama. His national and international relationships made him an administrator of waqfs (religious endowments). Apart from his ideas in the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) and Moslem World League (al-Rabitah al-'Alam al-Islami) he was also concerned about Islamic solidarity and issued some manifestoes regarding then current issues. As an example, we can take the case of defending the two holy cities (Haramayn): Mecca and Medina and defending Bosnia in which he intended to send Indonesian militia volunteers.¹⁷

B. Latief's Response to the Indonesian Political Context

1. National Development

It should be noted that Latief was an alim living in Indonesia's New Order period. Latief died before the resignation of Soeharto on 21 May 1998. Like many other contemporary Indonesian ulama, Latief can be called a modernist alim in the New Order

period. This is also because Latief became an alim in the period of the New Order. His activity as an alim, as far as I can trace, began in the period of the New Order when he was chosen as the leader of Persis in the 1980's.

For a better understanding of Latief's part in this period, one must comprehend the relationship between the New Order government with religious life in Indonesia. The following quote from an Indonesian Sociologist, Ignas Kleden, gives a general idea.

It is interesting to note how the government attempts to reformulate the role of religions in line with economical growth. This is attempted by restricting certain religious practices and giving an ease to other religious aspects. ... to the religions an ease in ceremonials, rituals, and devotional activities were given. ... But when the religions actively wanted to play socio-political roles ... they would be faced by the state's intervention.¹⁸

The New Order period was a period of economic growth for the country. Besides the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the government needed to have another channel of communications with Muslims as the religious majority. So, the government established in 1975 a national council of ulama, the Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI). The government's primary goal, as indicated by the theme used at the council's founding conference in 1975 ("ulama and Development"), was to use the MUI as a means of mobilizing Muslim support for its development policies.¹⁹ As Van Bruinessen mentions, "The working programme listed three broad tasks: strengthening of religion (understood in the Pancasila way) as a basis of national resilience, participation of ulama in the development of effort, and

¹⁶ To the roles of *ulama* Humphreys says that "[t]hey appear in our texts as semi-literate village Imams and erudite qadis, as rabble-rousers and privy counsellors to kings, as spiritual directors and cynical politicians. ... In short, they seem to cut across every possible classification of groups within Islamic society, playing a multiplicity of political, social, and cultural roles" Humphreys, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

¹⁷ *Pikiran Rakyat*, Selasa 14 Oktober 1997, p. 22; *Republika*, Selasa 14 Oktober 1997, p. 2.

¹⁸ Ignas Kleden, "Ilmu Sosial di Indonesia, Tindakan dan Refleksi dalam Perspektif Asia Tenggara," in Nico Schulte Nordholt and Leontine Visser (eds.), *Ilmu Sosial di Asia Tenggara dari Partikularisme ke Universalisme*, Jakarta: LP3ES, 1997, p. 20.

¹⁹ Van Bruinessen in Van Dijk and De Groot (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 103.

maintenance of harmonious relations with the other religions."²⁰

As for his participation in the development process, like other ulama, Latief had to talk about the economy. Therefore he wrote a paper titled, "Etika Ekonomi dalam Islam" [The ethics of economy in Islam].²¹ In this paper he expressed his opinion that among the trilogy of Indonesian development (Trilogi Pembangunan Indonesia, i.e. growth, stability, and equal distribution), the last one mentioned (equal distribution) should be the number one. In Latief's opinion, its ignorance would lead to economical gaps and unbalanced individual status in society. According to him, Indonesian Muslims needed a clean government to uphold 'amar ma'ruf, which meant upholding the truth and justice and nahy munkar: fight continually negative effects. In another instance he expressed that he did not agree with the government in taking the income from some businesses which is forbidden in Islam such as business in liquors, pig husbandry, and idols for worship. The reason for developing ethics of economy in Islam, Latief says, is theological: "If those [Islamic] values are obeyed, we will have a holistic advantage: physically and mentally, materially and spiritually, in this world and the hereafter (dunya-akhirah). If those values are refused, apart from its negative consequences for the stability of the society, we will be punished in the hereafter."²²

Latief agreed to the concepts of the national development in the sense of economic growth. But his concepts were still in line with the Qur'an and the Sunna. He explained some Islamic values on economy. It was his view that society should be brought in line with the holy scriptures, and not the other way around. So, when Latief faced different opinions of other ulama reinterpreting the Islamic rules in terms of economic development, he opposed these. As an example we can take the discussion between Latief and Prof. Ibrahim Hossen, the Chairman of Fatwa Commission of the MUI.

Hossen said that meat for sacrifice (qurban) or fines (dam) of the pilgrimage (hajj) could be substituted by money, because to him the aim of the sacrifice and fines is upgrading the welfare of Muslims. This opinion of fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) was related to the effort of supporting the economic development. Therefore, the money spent for the qurban or dam in Mecca would be taken to Indonesia in order to support the process of fighting the poverty in this country. Hossen wanted to underline that the aim of sacrifice is making the 'umma prosperous. Latief, on the contrary, argued that sacrifice is a matter of worship (ta'abbudi), and not a matter of thought (ta'aquuli). Latief concludes, in conformity with the Qur'an and the Sunna, that the first aim of observing sacrifice is taqwa (piety) and distribution of food for the poor is a result of this piety.²³ By this conclusion Latief wanted to declare that substituting money for meat is not allowed.

Latief was afraid that Hossen's idea was about to be considered as a national problem, as it was discussed in the Supreme Advisory Council (DPA -Dewan Pertimbangan Agung). Therefore he explained his view on the relationship between religious belief and national programs. His line of thinking is shown in the following quotations:

Regardless of whether or not there is an "order" from anywhere -of course the ulama should not be bound by any order—we should be objective, in order not to give the impression that "the MUI is a legalizing institution of the Government's policy". Even the reinterpretation of the sacrifice and fines itself is still a personal opinion (ijtihad al-fard), and not a consensus of ulama or an ijtihad al-jama'i. The case of the fatwa on the Porkas or the SDSB²⁴

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Latief, *op. cit.*, pp. 103-13. This writing was taken from a paper dated Bandung, 21 December 1996.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 113.

²³ "Penafsiran Kembali Pensyariatan Al-Hadyu" [Reinterpreting the command of slaughtering], Latief, *op. cit.*, pp. 309-17.

²⁴ The Porkas (Pekan Olahraga untuk Kesejahteraan Sosial -Sports Week for Social Welfare) stands for weekly lottery based on soccer scores. The SDSB (Sumbangan Dermawan Sosial Berhadiah -Social Charitative Contribution with Prizes) is the lottery which replaces the Porkas. For many ulama, both

[national gambling] which emerged from a personal fatwa should not be repeated. If the result of discussion about reinterpretation of the sacrifice and fines has not reached a consensus, there should be freedom in the application (as in the other worships) based on everybody's personal opinion and beliefs, and the sacrifice should not be collected in the form of qima (money) nationally. It is true that we should give an answer to all religious questions to anyone, including the Government. But, it should not contradict the Constitution of 1945 Chapter 29 article (2) saying that "The State certifies freedom of all people to adhere to their own religion and to perform their rituals based on their own religion and beliefs."²⁵

2. The Pancasila²⁶

As a leader of a mass organization (i.e. the Persis) under the New Order Latief had to agree with the Pancasila as the sole foundation of all mass and political organizations in the country. This idea of nationalization of the ideology was also developed from an economic perspective. Soeharto viewed that with a firm ideology like the Pancasila there would be stability in the country, which in turn would support the economic development. The Soeharto regime inherited several ideologies from the Old Order (the Soekarno era). Soeharto himself wanted ideologies other than his interpretation of the Pancasila to be eliminated. So, there had to be a process of the Pancasila indoctrination. The process of the "Pancasilaization" itself took a long time,

are considered gambling, and therefore *haram* (forbidden).

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Pancasila is the five basic principles of the Republic of Indonesia: the belief in one God Almighty, humanity that is just and civilized, the unity of Indonesia, democracy guided by the wisdom of representative deliberation, social justice for all Indonesians. John M. Echols and Hassan Shadily, *Kamus Indonesia-luggris: An Indonesian-English Dictionary*, 3rd edition, Jakarta: Gramedia, 1998, p. 406.

i.e. since the mid-1970's, it became effective, finally, in the early 1980's.²⁷

Latief became the General Chairman of Persis when the Bill of the Pancasila as the sole foundation (*asas tunggal*) was discussed in public. It is not clear what Latief's reaction to this was. But when the Bill was passed in 1985 with the sanction that whichever organization could not accept this would be dissolved, it is clear that Persis under Latief's leadership agreed to put the Pancasila as the Persis's sole foundation.

In 1984, Latief criticized the NU ulama who had declared the Pancasila as acceptable for Muslims, by founding themselves on Islamic views.²⁸ It seems that at that time, he did not agree that his organization would follow the Pancasila. But when he knew that the sanction was losing the legal base of the organization, he and his organization accepted it. At this time Latief's attitude was the same as the Shi'ite's ulama, something which is called the *taqiyya*.²⁹ Meanwhile, throughout his life, Latief was in opposition to Shi'a defenders. In reaction to this contradiction in Latief's position to offend Shi'a but to do *taqiyya*, Jalaluddin Rakhmat, a defender of Shi'ism in the country, replied, "Perhaps we are unwilling to use the term 'taqiyya', but we can replace it with the term 'flexible and good relationship approach'."³⁰

²⁷ Ample details about the process see Van Bruinessen in Van Dijk and De Groot (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 105-7.

²⁸ "Ibn Khaldun dan Filsafat Sejarah", Latief, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

²⁹ Ayatollah Khomeini defines *taqiyya* as concealing a faith and revealing an infidelity. See Jalaluddin Rakhmat, "Ustad Latief: Pembaru yang Sederhana" in Latief, *op. cit.*, p. Lix. In modern words it is called "preference falsification." See Timur Kuran, *Private Truths, Public Lies: The Social Consequences of Preference Falsification*, London: Harvard University Press, 1995, pp. 6-8.

³⁰ To Rakhmat, the expression of 'flexible and good relationship approach' was Latief's own words. Jalaluddin Rakhmat in Latief, *loc. cit.*

Latief's acceptance of the Pancasila can be seen, therefore, as a consequence of his role as a stabilizing leader³¹ who had to look after and defend his organization because the organization was big and had received many contributions such as religious endowments. This was the difference between him and his predecessors who organized Persis as a study club and did not have many waqfs (religious endowments). Under the former conditions, Persis ulama had nothing to lose in taking a more exclusive Islamic stance. Their doctrines were very strong and were still acknowledged until Latief's time. So, Latief had a lot to explain in accepting the Pancasila for his Persis community (both ulama and 'umma). Latief faced part of Persis's members with their "radical" ulama who did not want to follow the Bill. They said that Persis was based on the Qur'an and the Sunna, so that anything else apart from these should be rejected. They said: "It is better not to have the organization rather than becoming a mushrik, because living with another base besides the Qur'an and the Sunna means performing shirk."³²

Latief was aware that his community always based its ideas and activities on the Qur'an and the Sunna as sources of law (iukm). For this reason, he had initially criticized NU ulama for their acceptance of the Pancasila. However, in order to justify his change of opinion, he added an historical dimension to it. Latief argued that the Pancasila was not totally secular, so that it should not be rejected totally. Historically, he argued, there were Muslims who had contributed Islamic values to the Pancasila, so that did not have to be totally refused.³³

Still, his interpretation of the Pancasila in this positive way was a post-factum interpretation, because this historical interpretation came after the government's threat to disperse the non-obeying organizations. Latief's organization, therefore, accepted the Pancasila. But together with other Persis's leaders, Latief put Islam in Persis's concept of belief ('aqidah) after saying that the Pancasila was its basis in its statutes. Again, here there was a post-factum interpretation, as Persis's ulama said that this position in the Persis's statutes was justified by a kind of principle of abrogating-abrogated (nasikh-mansukh) where the latter (Islam) abrogates the first (the Pancasila).³⁴ Latief ascribed the latter interpretation to the "radical" 'umma and ulama.

Hence, there are two variables which should be considered here, i.e. in how far Latief and his organization were adapting themselves to the situation (dynamic aspect) and in how far they were compromising themselves (static aspect) in order to ensure their survival.³⁵ This survival strategy can be seen in Latief's writing, that there was no good in Persis's members regretting their choice after being "destroyed" by the government. Latief says, "There is nothing I want except good deeds."³⁶

3. Religious Plurality

Before diving into Latief's response to religious plurality, I would like to draw a picture of Indonesia's religious condition and the responses to it. For many centuries Indonesia received influences from outside,

³¹ I owe this term to Jalaluddin Rakhmat in his preface for Latief's collection of articles, *op. cit.*, p. Lii.

³² My interview with Atip Latiful Hayat, the General Chairman of Persis Youth (Pemuda Persis), performed in Leiden, August 1998. Federspiel defines *shirk* as "associating something or someone with God; worshipping someone other than God; hence polytheism." A *mushrik* is someone who performs shirk. See Federspiel, *op. cit.*, p. 204.

³³ My interview with Atip.

³⁴ My thank to my sister, Ida Hidayatul Aliyah, who had given me her interviews with K.H.I. Shadiqin, a member of the Dewan Hisbah of Persis, in Bandung, September 1998 and with K.H. Akhyar Syuhada, the vice-president of the Dewan Hisbah, in Cianjur, February 1999.

³⁵ This theory of dynamic and static aspect is from Kleden. See Ignas Kleden, *Sikap Ilmiah dan Kritik Kebudayaan [Scientific Conduct and the Critique of Culture]*, Jakarta: LP3ES, 1987, p. 95.

³⁶ Latief, "Radikalisme . . .", *loc. cit.*

including religions influences.³⁷ In 1998, the majority of the population was Muslim (87.1%). That leaves more than 10% for Christians, Hindu-Balinese, Buddhists, and adherents of a variety of cultic and animist religions.³⁸ This plurality caused religious conflicts in many areas of the country throughout the history of Modern Indonesia, especially between the Muslims and the Christians. These are generally related to the emergence of Christianization as a sensitive issue in a Muslim community.³⁹ Among other religious issues, this issue is still felt until today. Opposition and rivalry between religious groups are still regarded as if these are valid and natural.⁴⁰

In the Indonesian government's view, religious conflicts can cause national disintegration (in the Soekarno era) and instability in the process of development (in the Soekarno era). In an attempt to meet the challenges, the Indonesian government has made every effort to avoid religious conflicts and provided every opportunity which actively and dynamically guides, supports, preserves, and develops religion.⁴¹ The government established the Ministry of Religious Affairs on 3 January 1946. Since then this Ministry has tried to build religious harmony, which is called "Trilogi Kerukunan Antar Uma Beragama" [the Trilogy of Harmony among Adherents of Religion]: the internal religious harmony, the harmony between adherents of religions, and the harmony between adherents of religions and

the government.⁴² Here, the rationale for religious pluralism is pragmatism.⁴³

Guided by intellectuals in religious affairs, Indonesia's religious plurality has given birth to a new value system. By means of their digging into religious doctrines and intellectual discourses in a more or less closed circuit they offered religious pluralism as a value system in modern Indonesia. In Indonesia, this idea of pluralism can be traced in the ideas of religious thinkers such as Nurcholis Madjid, Djohan Effendi, and Abdurrahman Wahid in Muslim circles⁴⁴ and Th. Sumartana, Y.B. Mangunwijaya, Victor Tanja, Dick Hartoko, Lance Castles, and Mudji Sutrisno in both Catholic and Christian circles.⁴⁵ This is also the case in other religious circles like Buddhist and Hindu circles. So, it is clear that their reason for developing a view of religious pluralism is doctrinal in the sense of being based on their holy writings and theoretical in nature based on their social analysis of society.

Apart from the Muslim intellectuals, the discussion about religious plurality in the country was also held by the ulama.⁴⁶ As one of the ulama, Latief needed to talk about it.

³⁷ Th. Sumartana, *Mission in the Crossroads: Indigenous Churches, European Missionaries, Islamic Association and Socio-Religious Change in Java 1812-1936*, Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 1993, p. 342.

³⁸ Merle Ricklefs, "Indonesia's old order, the New Order", *The Asia-Pacific Magazine*, No. 11 1998, p. 19.

³⁹ Hendropuspito, *Sosiologi Agama [Sociology of Religion]*, Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 1991, p. 189.

⁴⁰ Sumartana, *op. cit.*, p. 343.

⁴¹ Ignas Kleden, in Nordholt and Visser (eds.), *loc. cit.*

⁴² Alfian, *Transformasi Sosial Budaya dalam Pembangunan Nasional [Social and Cultural Transformation in National Development]*, Jakarta: UI-Press, 1986, p. 248.

⁴³ V.J. Vatikiotis, *Indonesian Politics Under Suharto*, London: Routledge, 1993, p. 126.

⁴⁴ Norma H. Thompson (ed.), *Religious Pluralism and Religious Education*, Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1988, p. 9; Aryn B. Sajoo, *Pluralism in "Old Societies and New States"*, *Emerging ASEAN Contexts*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1994, p. 43; Greg Barton, "Indonesia's Nurcholish Madjid and Abdurrahman Wahid as Intellectual ulama: The Meeting of Islamic Traditionalism and Modernism in Neo-Modernist Thought" in *Studia Islamika*, Vol. 2, No. 3, 1995, pp. 1-75.

⁴⁵ *Dialog: Kritik dan Identitas Agama [Dialogue: Religious Critique and Identity]*, Yogyakarta: Seri Dian I Tahun I, 1994, p. 118.

⁴⁶ E.g. between the MUI and the other religious organizations. *INIS Newsletter*, Leiden University, the Netherlands, vol. IV, 1991, pp. 34-5 also pp. 37-8.

Latief, however, viewed that religious harmony in a living religious plurality was the result of tolerance among religious leaders in their way of propagating their beliefs. About Latief's reaction to the Christianization in the country I quote a report from INIS Newsletter as follows:

... K.H. Latief Mochtar, said that the Christians had broken existing regulations. From the Islamic point of view, the Christian concept of diakonia is unjustified because Muslims only have the duty to explain the difference between truth and falsehood. In Islam there is no question of luring people away from another belief by using material means. Latief Mochtar urged all religious communities to make the implementation of the joint ministerial decree on harmonious relations between the different religious communities, which forbids missionary activities among adherents of another religion, more effective. He even suggested that the decree should contain sanctions.⁴⁷

Latief called for Muslims to engage more in active participation in da'wa, in economical projects, and in criticizing cases of Christianization by approaching the local government.⁴⁸

Something unique in Latief's opinion is his criticism of selling idols and performing local beliefs by Muslims. Although Latief recognized religious plurality of the country, he did not want Muslims to support other religious adherents, i.e. by selling idols. His point is neither political, nor sociological, nor economical. His message is simply theological: selling idols for worship is forbidden (haram).⁴⁹

Reacting to the local beliefs influencing national cinema, Latief, together with other Persis's members, called on the government to impose strict censorship on mystical films.⁵⁰ This statement was given at

the end of the Eleventh National Congress of Persis. Mystical beliefs are still practiced by Muslims. These beliefs are also supported by the government in line with its policy on tourism. In reaction to this Latief says:

In the mean time, for the sake of tourism, jahili customs (including ceremonies connected to the concepts of shirk, takhayyul, khurafat, dances, witchcraft, and others) seem to be maintained in the framework of national culture, and to attract foreign tourists, at once. This kind of custom cannot be accepted to develop national customs and culture as desired by Islam as well as the [national] development. God says, "False worship (shirk) is indeed the highest wrongdoing." (QS. Luqman verse 13).⁵¹

4. Cultural Islamization

Latief brought about openness (keterbukaan) to Persis's thought (1983-1997). His approach was low profile and educational-persuasive, so that he successfully deleted the impression of Persis being radical.⁵² His cultural approach came both from a historical necessity of Persis as a social movement and from his intellectual encounters in the academical environment of the Faculty of Postgraduate Studies at the State Institute for Islamic Studie (IAIN) of Jakarta. In this atmosphere he faced scientific discussions about Islam, including his organization.⁵³

Something interesting about Latief is that while the former Persis's leaders strived for Islamization through the structural one; the dissemination of ideas and in the parliamentary way,⁵⁴ Latief asserted that

⁴⁷ "Tantangan Masa Kini dan Masa Depan" [The Challenges of Today and the Future], Latief, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

⁴⁸ Dadan Wildan Annas, *Yang Dim Yang Politikus: Hayat dan Perjuangan Lima Tokoh Persis*, Bandung: Rosda, 1997, p. vi.

⁴⁹ Jalaluddin Rakhmat, "Ustad Latief...", Latief, *op. cit.*, p. Liii.

⁵⁰ Among the Persis's leaders, A. Hassan is well known for his efforts in disseminating ideas, to whom Soekarno learnt Islam, whereas M. Natsir is famous for his efforts in parliamentary way of his party of *Masyumi* (*Majelis Syuro Muslimin Indonesia*) which brought him to be one of Indonesia's prime ministers in the Soekarno era. Syafiq

⁴⁷ INIS Newsletter, vol. XII, 1996, p. 143.

⁴⁸ A. Latief Muchtar, "Al-Harakah Nashraniah di Indonesia (Tinjauan Sekilas)" [The Christian's Movement in Indonesia (A Glance View)], a paper for intern publication dated Bandung, 7 May 1992.

⁴⁹ "Etika Ekonomi...", Latief, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

⁵⁰ INIS Newsletter, vol. XIV, 1997, p. 59.

Islamization should also be reached by the cultural one: developing social institutions. He supported the establishment of Islamic banks, Islamic insurance, orphanages, mass organizations, Islamic press, and so on. These social institutions should adhere to the way of Islam, so that Muslims can integrally perform Islam.⁵⁵ He also hoped that these Muslim institutions could be independent institutions in order to avoid non-Islamic interests.⁵⁶

This effort can be linked to his idea of supporting cultural Islamization, which according to him was the most suitable way in his time (Soeharto regime): "At least, if there is no Islamic state, there should be a state ordering (mengamanatkan) Islamic practices. Politics is not the only way. Today we emphasize the cultural approach. And I saw that in fact, the cultural approach gradually entered very much into bureaucracy."⁵⁷

Still, Latief was an ambitious alim who wanted to Islamize the country as far as possible. Therefore, he also wanted to be involved in national politics. Latief's involvement in Indonesian politics can be understood as his way of da'wa. This is because he felt that "politics is always the commander in the country", for it has a structural power which makes the application

of all kind of programs easier. As a result, he wanted to be one of the decision makers in political life, especially in relation to his concern of Islamizing the country.⁵⁸ We can illustrate this by an example of his political jargon. Concerning the corruption in the country Latief's logic is purely Islamic. When he campaigned for the PPP (Partai Persatuan Pembangunan, United Development Party, the amalgamated Muslim party), as a national campaigner he shouted, "It cannot be explained that in a country where Muslims are the majority, corruptions still exist."⁵⁹

C. Conclusion

From the above explanation we can see that ulama are not only religious scholars but also activists. They should become activists because of their own idealism. The idealism of the ulama, from the obligation of the doctrines they have, is Islamization of human life. In the case of Latief, he viewed that the world should be Islamic and conform to the Prophet's vision and his companions.

In Indonesian political life, unlike other Sunni ulama, who usually represented legitimacy in state and religion, Latief only gave de facto recognition and compliance, rather than legitimacy. Here, it seems that he followed a Shi'ite tradition to escape from the issue of legitimation. Latief changed his mind, however, when he felt that President Soeharto tended to be close to the Muslims in the 1990's. Although other Persis ulama accused him of being a legitimizing alim, his motive which heard directly from him was quite clear: his Islamic mission.

Latief's position brings me to conclude that Latief was an Indonesian alim who came from an Islamic modernist tradition. He had his own followers. And, as his predecessors (Persis ulama) did, he had always struggled for his religion. In the

Mughni, Hassan Bandung: *Pemikir Islam Radikal*, Surabaya: Bina Ilmu, 1980, p. 81; George McT. Kahin, "In Memoriam: Mohammad Natsir (1907-1993)" in *Indonesia*, Cornell University, No. 56 (October), 1993, p. 160.

⁵⁵ "Pemantapan Kesadaran Wajib Zakat: Pengelolaan dan Pendayagunaannya" [Strengthening the awareness of alms: its management and efficiency], Latief, *op. cit.*, p. 123. This paper was originally submitted for a seminar in the Islamic University of Bandung (UNISBA) and the PW Pemuda Muhammadiyah of West Java. He could not present his paper because he had to attend an OIC meeting. This paper was dated Bandung, 15 January 1991.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

⁵⁷ An interview with K.H.A. Latief Muchtar, *Ummat*, Jakarta, No. 7 Thn. 1, 2 October 1995/7 Jumadil Awal 1416 H., p. 39.

⁵⁸ My interview for the *RISALAH*, the magazine of Persis, with Latief in his house, Bandung, 1995. Unfortunately I cannot trace the exact edition of the magazine which published my interview.

⁵⁹ *Republika*, national daily newspaper, 10 May 1997, p. 6.

context of his religious community ('umma) he can be regarded as a cultural broker who could offer a religious solution to deal with the changing situation.

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